

How Bills Become Laws in Virginia

The General Assembly creates and changes the laws of Virginia. It is made up of two groups:

- The Senate of Virginia (40 Senators)
- The House of Delegates (100 Delegates)

The General Assembly meets every year beginning on the second Wednesday in January. They are in session for 60 days in even-numbered years and normally lengthens the 30-day, odd-numbered years to 46 days.

A bill becomes a law through several steps:

1. A delegate or senator has an idea for a bill, usually from a constituent. This usually either changes the current law, adds a new law, or deletes an existing law.
2. The delegate presents the idea to the Division of Legislative Services and requests that it be drafted into a bill. The member who introduces a piece of legislation is called the *patron* or the *sponsor*. The bill is signed by the patron, introduced, and printed.
3. The bill is referred to an appropriate committee. The committee is a group of legislators organized for the purpose of considering and deciding upon the disposition of a bill or resolution.
4. The members of the committee consider the bill and decide what action to take. At this point the public can speak on issues related to the bill. Any citizen of the Commonwealth has the right to attend a committee meeting and speak about legislation. The committee has several options for action. These include:
 - *Report* – The majority of the committee approves of the bill and it is reported to the floor or to another committee.
 - *Pass by Indefinitely (PBI)* – This action allows the committee to reconsider the legislation.
 - *Defeat* – The committee rejects the motion to report the bill and they take no further action.
 - *Continue/Carry over* – A bill introduced in an even-numbered year session may be continued to an odd-numbered year session for further action or study. A bill may not be continued from an odd-numbered year to an even-numbered year.
 - *Pass by for the day* – The committee is not ready to act on the bill. If the bill is not taken up before the deadline, then it is considered “Left in Committee” or “No Action Taken”.
 - *No Action or Leave in Committee* – No motion is made on the bill and it dies at the time of the committee action deadline.
 - *Incorporate into other Legislation* – The bill is incorporated, or included into another bill.
5. If the committee decides to report the bill the Virginia Constitution requires that the title of each bill be read three times or appear in the printed Calendar on three different days.
 - First Reading: The bill title is printed in the Calendar or is read by the Clerk, and the bill advances to the second reading.
 - Second Reading: The next day the bill title appears in the printed Calendar on the second reading. Bills are considered in the order in which they appear on the Calendar. A bill on

second reading is amendable, and therefore this is referred to as the “*amendable stage*”. A bill that has passed second reading with or without an amendment is “*engrossed*”. If an amendment is adopted, the bill is reprinted in its final form for passage.

- Third Reading: The next day, the engrossed bill title appears in the Calendar on the third reading. By recorded vote, the bill is passed. These votes are a matter of public record.
6. Communication: When passed, the bill is sent to the other body (either the Senate or House of Delegates), either by the Clerk in a communication or by a member in person, informing the other body that the bill has passed.

In the other body: The bill goes through essentially the same procedure as it did in the house of origin. The bill title is printed in the Calendar or is read by the Clerk. The bill is referred to a standing committee, considered, and reported by the committee. The title is read a second and third time before passage. If the other body passes the bill without amendment, it is enrolled and sent to the Governor.

7. Conference: If there are changes by the other body, the bill and the changes must be communicated back to the originating body for consideration. If these are agreed to, the bill is enrolled and sent to the Governor. If the changes are not agreed to, a *Committee of Conference* (usually three members from each legislative body) may be formed to resolve differences. If a Committee of Conference is not formed, the bill fails to pass.
8. Enrollment: After being passed by both houses of the General Assembly, the bill is printed as an *enrolled bill*, examined, and signed by the presiding officer of each chamber.
9. Governor: The bill is then sent to the Governor for his/her approval. The Governor has three options:

- Sign
- Veto
- Offer amendments to the bill

The Governor may also veto one or more items in a appropriation bill. If the Governor does not act on a bill, it becomes law without his signature. If the Governor signs a bill, the bill is sent to the Clerk of the House (Keeper of the Rolls of the Commonwealth) and is assigned a Chapter number. All Chapters of a session are compiled and bound as the *Acts of Assembly*.

Bills that become law at a regular session (or the reconvened session that follows) are effective the first day of July following adjournment, unless otherwise specified.

** The following are ways to express your opinion on a legislative issue, find out whom your legislators, or are to research bills related to Aging or Long-Term Care:

- Go to The Virginia Legislature* web site and click on “Who’s My Legislator”
- During the session: call the Constituent Viewpoint operators @ 800-889-0229
- When not in session:
 - House of Delegates Legislative Information Office @ 804-698-1500
 - Senate Legislative Information Office @ 804-698-7410

The Virginia Legislature web site has provided the summary information. For more information, please contact Legislative Information at 804-698-1500 or visit the Web site at <http://leg1.state.va.us/>.